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to be most prevalent. Rain-storms and cloud continue to alternate with brilliant periods throughout March and April, till in May the pleasant season of trade winds once more begins. 132

Under these humid conditions the west coasts of all the larger islands suffer the most, the east coasts being more open to the refreshing trades. Most favourably situated of all are the Small Islands, which are among the most pleasant spots in the whole archipelago. Here the temperature rarely rises above 95° Fahrenheit, even in the hot weather, and though the moisture makes this feel much hotter than a similar temperature in a dry climate, the nights are nearly always cool.

Geology.

While the geological composition of the larger islands of the group varies and most are mountainous, the highest peak in Santo rising to a height of some 4500 feet, there is little doubt that the whole group owes its position above the surface of the ocean to volcanic action. There is on many islands, including Malekula, evidence that this action has taken place in abrupt stages, seen in the coral terraces that rise in giant steps, clothed in thick jungle, up the mountain-sides, each representing a sudden elevation of the land. Though this has doubtless been the general trend, contrary cases of submergence are also on record, such as that of two reefs situated between Atchin and Vao which formerly were populous islands, the story of whose submergence is told below.[1] 133

Except in the case of a few well-populated coral islets, however, all minor natural features are obscured from observation by a uniform mass of dark green bush formed of huge trees and tangled undergrowth coming right down to the shore of the larger islands, relieved only in some cases, as in North Malekula, by the light green of the bamboo groves capping the mountains which rise behind. Here and there, if one approaches closer, small groves of coconut trees close to the coast mark the presence of human habitation. But, owing to the necessity of sheltering their dwellings from the hurricanes, it is rare that any house is ever visible from the sea. Save for the meeting of an occasional canoe, however thickly the land may be populated, the only sign of life visible from a boat is in the season for burning the bush for new gardens, when tall columns of smoke may be seen from the interior climbing up into the still air. In most places, also, the coast is fringed with coral reefs, making approach dangerous except by means of the few channels carved through them by the fresh water from some mountain stream. 137 133

Fauna.

On the other hand, though the sea abounds with sharks and certain low-lying areas are infested with mosquitoes and fever, no native need 136

[1] See Chapter XXII.

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have any fear of beasts. For, with the exception of man himself, the dog and pig which he has brought, the rat which came in his rafts or canoes, and the fruit bats that may have arrived nestling among his provisions, no mammals of any kind have reached these islands from the land-masses where they evolved. Thus, the native lives free from the fear of animals, or of anything worse than the climate, the mosquitoes, the hurricanes which sometimes spoil his crops or wreck his canoes; and the only living things he is ever called on to defend himself against are other men, as will be seen in the chapter on Warfare. Even the snakes are harmless—although the fear of them is great, owing largely to psychological causes taken advantage of by certain magicians said to have power to change themselves into these creatures, and possibly partly also to a racial memory of continental origin where snakes are physically harmful.

DISTRICTS OF MALEKULA

The origin of the name Malekula is obscure. Though now used by those of the younger natives who have been on plantations and speak pidgin-English, there is no known native dialect to which it belongs. Dr. Ivens suggests that the first half of the word, which corresponds with that of Malaita in the Solomon Islands, means simply "people," and points out that in both islands overt descent is patrilineal, while their neighbours are for the most part matrilineal.[1] However this may be, no natives of any part of Malekula today possess any name for the whole island. This may be due partly to the restricted nature of their geographical knowledge,[2] but may also be attributed to the complete lack of any cohesion, either political or linguistic, or even racial, of the innumerable small groups that form its scattered population.

It is not my intention to attempt here any but the briefest survey of the cultures of Malekula, an island with an area of about 780 square miles (that is to say about half the size of Cornwall, which it resembles somewhat in shape), where, apart from other cultural differences, the languages are so numerous that each group of villages speaks a distinct dialect of its own sufficiently different from that of its neighbours that a journey of three miles often takes one into an entirely distinct linguistic area. So unknown are most parts of Malekula still today, and so intricate the mountain ranges that intersect it, that few parts of the interior have even been visited by a white man, and almost the whole of our very limited knowledge of it is confined to a few of the coastal districts.

[1] Ivens, 3, p. 20.

[2] This statement may seem strange in view of the existence of sea-going canoes. It is a fact, however, that in spite of their voyages to other islands over what I have termed the inland sea, not even traditions exist of any Small Island canoe having ever sailed round Malekula.

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name of Marawa ("spider") given to one of the early *Tamate* Societies which may be entered by a baby in arms.[1]

The other extension is more interesting, since it provides a connexion between the spider's web and the mortuary labyrinth mythology of Seniang, in South-West Bay. In the mythology of that area the Guardian Ghost sits by a cave on the sea-shore, having drawn beside her on the sand a labyrinth figure which the ghost of the dead man on his way to the Land of the Dead must know how to complete. If he cannot do this, she eats him. The drawing of labyrinth designs, based on the above myth but now largely secular in character, is a common pastime all over the Northern New Hebrides, where they are drawn with the finger in ashes or sand.[2] It is easy to understand how the spider's web spun by the Guardian Ghost in one area should become associated with the labyrinth design drawn by the Guardian Ghost in another. A tale combining both motives comes from South Raga, and relates how one day the deity, there called Barkulkul, when leaving his house, left his wife in it and "shut the door by making, with a liana, a design similar to a spider's web." When he came back, finding the design disturbed, he went to the men's house, where he said to the men, "Let us make drawings." They made drawings in the ashes, similar to spiders' webs, and when Barkulkul saw that his brother Marrelul made the same design as Barkulkul himself had made, he knew that it was he who had entered his house in his absence and seduced his wife. And so he killed him.[3] This story is, of course, a degraded one, but serves to show the widespread symbolism of the spider's web as a labyrinthine structure with a devouring monster in its midst.

Guardian Ghost as "Megapode."

Another interesting piece of symbolism in connexion with the Guardian Ghost is that found in North Raga, where Subwe is also called Malau,[4] which means bush-turkey, or megapode. This remarkable bird has huge claws, with which it digs long tunnels into the ground in which to lay its eggs.[5] The habits of the bird are largely nocturnal, and at night it emits wailing cries. These cries are associated with ghosts, and the tunnelling activity recalls the underground world where the Guardian Ghost lives, which, in the case of Vao, is, as we shall see, a cave. Yet further, the megapode favours volcanic soil on account of the extra warmth it supplies for hatching eggs,[6] and volcanoes are also, as we shall see, connected with

[1] Rivers, 1, vol. I, p. 110. [2] See Chapter XXV. [3] Tattevin, 2, 1929, p. 988.
[4] Rivers, 1, vol. I, p. 189. Compare also Atimis Malau in South-West Bay.
[5] The New Hebridean megapode, *megapodius layardi*, does not build mounds like other members of the species (see p. 752). In Matanavat on the north coast of Malekula, the bird, there called *mola*, is semi-sacred. "If one village gives a scrub-turkey to another, that is a token of permanent peace." Such exchange is there even more sacred than the exchange of hawks (Harrisson, 2, p. 55).
[6] Rivers, 1, vol. II, p. 461.

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APPENDIX II

NOTE ON SOME RITUALLY IMPORTANT BIRDS

BY

TOM HARRISSON

The Hawk.

There are two hawks in the New Hebrides, the Harrier, *Circus approximans wolffi*, and the Falcon, *Peregrinus ernesti*. 136

The Harrier nests on the ground, in wild cane.[1] It is the largest land-bird of the New Hebrides, and very similar to the three types of Harrier found in Britain. The particular New Hebridean form is a subspecies of the type widely distributed in the Pacific zone. The bird is conspicuous for its alternating flight, beating for a few strokes, then gliding. In this way it quarters over the cane-fields, seeking rodents, the small birds that frequent the cane like *Zosterops*, the White-eye, and the Parrot Finches, *Erythrura*. On the whole of Malekula there would not be more than four or five pairs of this hawk; on Santo a few more. An island the size of Vao could not possibly support a pair. For they eat large quantities, including also beetles, and other hard insects; and they like to fly over long distances, and to soar high in the sky, wheeling up in wide circles above their territory. Moreover, the native habit of burning the cane, and the general inflammability of the cane-brakes, keeps down the numbers by destroying the nests and nesting-sites. The bird is a general buff colour, and a specimen collected by me can be found in the Natural History Museum.

The Peregrine Falcon is even rarer than the Harrier. To the eye, it is almost identical with the Peregrine Falcon of Devon and Cornwall. In fact, it is a subspecies of the same species as is found in England. The particular New Hebridean form, *ernesti*, is itself found over a huge area. The Peregrine Falcon is thus one of the most widely distributed birds in the world. I have even seen a specimen in mid-Pacific, as described in the last chapter of *Savage Civilisation*.[2] These birds nest in cliffs and in inaccessible rocks, and are sometimes ferocious in the protection of their young. The bird is small in the body, tremendously long in the wing, and probably the fastest flyer of any bird. It eats mostly the smaller birds, and the single specimen that I obtained contained the remains of the mountain parakeet, *charmynsopsis*, a White-eye, a dove.

Though these birds are both numerically exceedingly scarce, they fly over great distances, and spend nearly all day on the wing. Their conspicuous features are, firstly, their supreme ability in flight, and secondly, their frequent and ferocious killing of other birds, which, to natives with whom I have discussed the matter, is clearly associated with some idea of cannibalism. 825

[1] This refers to the cane-fields on the uplands of Malekula.
[2] Harrisson, 2.

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825 I have 50 or 60 different native names for both birds, but almost without exception the root *Mal* forms a part of these names. Often the name for the Falcon in one tribe is the name for the Harrier in the next, and vice versa. In fact, the two are interchangeable.

Ritual attitude towards birds.

While New Hebrideans are very keen naturalists, they do not look on species in the same way as an ornithologist does. In some cases they class two or three birds together as belonging to one species, in other cases they divide several plumage phases of one bird into different species. This is not due to ignorance, because they know that these phases come from the same eggs, and that the species they class together do not mate together, have different nesting habits, etc. The tendency is much more associated with their ritual attitude to birds, or rather to birds that are important in ritual. All birds which have red in their plumage are particularly confused etymologically. And all birds with red in their plumage are particularly used in ritual in the New Hebrides, especially in Santo, Malekula and around Oba, where red is so important in many ceremonies.

Bush-Turkey.

136 825 There is one bird which has some red on it, but not in the form of feathers suitable for head-dresses, belts, etc. This is the so-called Bush-Turkey, *Megapodius layardi*,[1] which is characterised by its skulking jungle habits, dog-like bark, and the fact that the New Hebridean form is not a mound-builder, but digs long tunnels into the ground, in which it places its eggs. I have elsewhere described the importance of the Megapode, especially its use in ritual interchange, even more elaborate interchange than that used in connexion with the Harrier, between villages in North Malekula. The same thing is found on Malo, where flying foxes are used in precisely the same way, and where the natives ascribe the origin of the Ranked Society to these interchanges. Rivers has already noticed the widespread use of the root *Mal* (as in *malau*) for the megapode all over the Pacific. On p. 340 of *Savage Civilisation* I have pointed out his erroneous conclusion from this fact. As I see it, the explanation of this is that the natives who swept down into the Pacific and spread all over it, had in their mind certain qualities which they described by the term *Mal*, and applied this term wherever they arrived to suitable birds.

Frigate Bird.

There is one other very important bird, which, unlike the Harrier and the Falcon, combines the quality of redness with the quality of superb flight and predacious habit. That is the Frigate Bird, the huge sea-bird which ranges all over the Pacific Ocean, and lives largely by pursuing other birds and forcing them to sick up their food, in the same way that the Skuas of Britain do. The Frigate Bird has a scarlet throat-patch, enormous wing-spread, a forked tail similar, on a larger scale, to the forked tail of the Harrier, and a superb flight. But the Frigate Bird keeps mostly out to sea and nests only on remote and tiny islands. For people who live on larger islands,

[1] This is not called after the author, but after his first cousin twice removed, the late Edgar Leopold Layard, C.M.G., British Consul in Nouméa from 1872 to 1890, and brother of Sir Henry Austin Layard.

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inland, the Frigate Bird can only be seen very rarely. I am certain, as a result of many conversations, that in such cases the Frigate Bird becomes equated with the Harrier and Falcon. The native names are again inextricably confused, and one can almost trace the Frigate Bird's dominance on the small coastal islands like Vao and Atchin, decreasing as one goes inland into the Middle Nambas, and disappearing as one gets on to the high cane-plateau of the Big Nambas. In my opinion, also, the Frigate Bird was definitely the original symbol, and the suitable symbol of a sea-going people.

Shearwater and Swift.

There are two other groups of birds to which special attention is paid by the natives, and who have widely similar names all over the islands, the Shearwaters and the Swifts. The Swifts, usually having names based on the root *rara*, are miniature falcons in flight, though not in habit. After the falcons, they are the fastest flyers. The Shearwaters, like the Frigate Bird, are tireless sea-goers, and also conspicuous in that in certain seasons they swarm literally in hundreds of thousands, passing on their way to certain nesting-grounds, one of which happens to be in the New Hebrides, in a small uninhabited island near Tongoa which I visited and where I studied their habits. It so happens that the main stream of these birds passes just off the Small Islands on its way south, and I have myself witnessed this mass-migration, carrying on in an almost continuous line for thirty-six hours.

Owl.

Finally, there is the Owl. Again, its native name is the same practically all over the Pacific, *Lulu*. Again, it is predacious, killing other birds and rodents. Again, it is comparatively scarce in the islands. And again, it is a bird which has a very wide distribution. Like the Falcon, but unlike the Harrier, the New Hebridean form is actually only a subspecies, and exactly the same species as that found in Britain, *Tyto alba*. The Owl has the particular attribute of being nocturnal, the only strictly nocturnal bird in the New Hebrides. The name *Lulu* is also widely used of the pygmoid peoples, who are in most places extinct, and who are widely regarded as the original Hebridean stock. The Owl is not etymologically confused with any of the other birds, and is not so important in ritual; rather is it important, I think, as a fear and superstition symbol, the spirit of the night.